

put them in to begin with, that there was going to be a terrific job of moving everything when they added additional stacks. so I found a way of getting a little more money to buy stacks on some of the between-floor floors that they added up there. So they could go ahead and plan to put the volumes in and put them in in the general areas they were going to have them stay right from the beginning. That made the librarian and the superintendent and a lot of people real happy. That was a personal decision on my part which I don't regret. It's a good deal.

It was a very interesting project. It's hard to do it with the cadets there and not interfere with them. But it was expensive; expensive to a large extent because of the location. There had been congressional investigations galore into the subject, and basically it's the labor union principles and agreements and wages and rates, travel time allowed from New York, all based on New York costs transposed up there. This caused a lot of trouble, and it almost killed the project. It got worse after I retired, and Congress questioned the veracity of the reports being given. After I retired I became a member of the consulting board appointed by the superintendent and the Secretary of the Army, really, to look into it and report to the Congress what the costs should be and why it was this way and that everything was being done to hold them down that could be and that we ought to continue to go or not continue to go. I served on that board for close to three years. I made at least nine visits. They canceled the board along about September or October of '73, figuring that the job was done--it had started in September of 1970. It had some high-level architects and engineers and academic types. M.P. O'Brien out at the University of California was a member of the board. General Johnson, the former Chief of Staff of the Army, was a member of the board. It was a pretty well-qualified board, and it was a pleasure to serve on it. I was delighted to see it clear the air, and I think we did some good in reestablishing a little confidence in the estimates. That came after I had retired.

Q: Could you comment on your part in getting the Corps involved in postal construction after you retired as Chief?



General Wilson (r.) with his successor as Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General William F. Cassidy.

A: I had an opportunity a few years after I had retired to do something else for the Corps, informally, in that when Red Blount of Blount Construction Company in Montgomery was designated, as the Postmaster General, to try and improve the efficiency of the Post Office Department and to have a big construction program under the Postmaster General, he asked me to come up and see him and offered me a position on his staff to handle the construction.¹²⁴

Q: Does your association with Blount go back many years?

A: Oh, off and on since I was down here in the Mobile District in the fifties. And later as deputy chief and as Chief, and, on one occasion as deputy, I called him on the phone, it was on the missile business, and said, "I don't want to see another bid from you until you've caught up with what you're doing. You're overextended." He protested a little bit at the time, but not very seriously. Almost a year went by, and I checked and checked again. And finally I called him and said, "Okay, we think you've caught up with your britches now. I'll withdraw my informal request." He could have bucked me on that very easily, and I'd have had a hard time legally keeping it up. But anyhow, I had known him pretty well and he did do good work. His problem was he got overextended.

I had guessed what he was going to ask me, so I had gone by the Chief of Engineers' office and talked with Bill Cassidy and Fred Clarke, who was then the deputy, and asked if they wanted me to suggest the Corps of Engineers. I told them I thought the Post Office Department would be a whole lot better off picking up an organization like the Corps to give them help than to pick up a gent, one man who'd have to build a staff and go through all the throes of that. They said it was all right with them if I wanted to suggest it to Red.

So I talked with Red for about an hour or so, and I said, "Red, I appreciate the confidence and I think it would be a fine idea, but I don't think it would be in your best interest. I think you'd do *far* better by hiring the Corps of Engineers_ just like NASA did. You've worked under them, you know

whether you think they're doing a good job or not. You'll get far better service for the Post Office Department and the taxpayer doing it that way than by me coming and trying to build up." And he said, "I don't want it. I'd rather have you, but I'll talk about it with my people." I said, "Okay, I'll tell the Chief of Engineers that you may be asking." He said, "Fine, you may do that." So very shortly thereafter, he got together with the Chief of Engineers and they activated the plan, and I believe that everybody has been satisfied that it was a good program, although I have no real knowledge of what happened to the program;

I had retained the home I had built when I was District Engineer and hoped to get an offer of a job in the Mobile area after I retired so I could come back and live out my days here. So I hadn't sold the house. We had rented it very successfully. We had 13 years of rental and only nine months' total vacancy during that period of time, and people generally kept pretty good care of it. The mortgage had been paid off, and the renters had upped the rent voluntarily to get me to add air-conditioning. So we had an air-conditioned house, paid for.

About the time it was known that I was going to have to retire, I got an offer from one of the companies in Mobile that I respected to come work with them, so I accepted. I went to Denmark and Sweden to the PIANC [Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses] meeting in July 1965 and returned the first of August to go to work for Southern Industries Corporation. I joined them as a vice president and within less than a year was elected a director. Southern Industries is a small conglomerate with wholly owned subsidiaries and a variety of activities. Through its operating subsidiaries it produces and markets aggregates for the construction and chemical industry, including shell, sand, gravel, slag, and stone, ready-mixed concrete in a couple of cities, asphaltic concrete in several, and concrete block, chemical and agricultural lime, poultry feed supplement, all of this primarily based on oyster shell, 5,000- or 10,000-year-old dead reef oyster shell, which they dredge. By means of permits in the areas in which they are doing the shell

dredging, they have gotten into oil and natural gas on a small scale in that particular area. Generally speaking that's the kind of things they do, with anywhere from four to six subsidiary companies from time to time. It has been a very interesting job.

I deliberately told them when I came that I didn't want the pay they offered because I thought it was too much, I didn't mean to work that hard, which surprised them. But we made an agreement where I got deferred payments to some extent after I retired. I couldn't retire, because I'd ruin their retirement system, but I get deferred payments for about ten years after I gave up the directorship. I told them I didn't want to end up as president, I didn't want to be the big shot. I'd had enough of that. It took about a year to convince the young people working around through the company that I really meant it, and after that my life was very pleasant. I'd get called on for all kinds of problems, interesting problems where I could help them without taking over the responsibility other than that of a vice president and director in general terms. It was very fine. I gave them a little management study in the organization and made some suggestions, none of which they bought, but a year later all of which had been put into effect. I helped establish age 65 as a retirement age, and very soon I hit age 65, so I had to retire as vice president.

I stayed on as director and then they asked if I wouldn't change that to the status of a consultant so I could stay with them and do certain things with them, particularly keeping up with the various water organizations they belonged to, like the Water Resources Congress, the National Waterway Conference, the Warrior-Tombigbee Association, the Gulf Intercoastal Association, and American Waterway Operators. All of these things I had been participating in representing them and this saved them a certain amount of effort in the field, and I enjoyed it. They pay my expenses to go to these things and also those of my wife because I'm getting too old to travel on my own. It's a very pleasant situation. I do do them some good. I work pretty hard every now and then for a little while, but in the consultant field, no. I do just

as much as is necessary, and they more or less leave it up to me to decide which things I ought to go to; although every now and then they'll say, "Here's something coming up we wish you'd participate in." So I have got a small retainer and I have a desk, filing cabinet, and access to a xerox, and that's the extent of my activities at their office. It works very well. By now, we're down to where I go maybe two or three times a week for one or two hours at most unless it's something special.

Now in addition, we had a thing called Task Force 200 here in Mobile, which was the industrial development part of the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce. It was a fairly big effort. Southern Industries more or less volunteered me to be their representative on this thing. It ended up with me being chairman of Task Force 200 starting about 1966, about a year after I had joined Southern Industries. I devoted a lot of time to that because also at that same time they announced that Brookley Field was going to close and the government was moving out, and I helped get the community to accept the fact that it was going to happen, to' quit fighting it and to try to find out ways to get control of it and develop it and make use of it. It was a very interesting field and I got to meet the industries that were considering moving to Mobile. I really think I did some good. I stayed in that job until mid-1972, by which time I figured I had done my share of that and let somebody else have a chance at it. This really occupied my time. I devoted an awful lot of time to that for those years but no longer is that a demand on my time except occasionally. I still take part in the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, to which I'm a consultant, not a paid consultant, I'm just a member of a citizen policy group. But a lot of these things I got into as a result of being the chairman of Task Force 200.

Also when I came down here I got agreement from the president and management of Southern Industries that I could be an outside consultant if I wanted to. It would be up to me to try and keep from reducing my usefulness to the company, but we could work out the arrangement necessary so I could take on work. As a consultant, as I mentioned earlier,

in March of 1966, I was a consultant to the premier of the province of Manitoba, Canada, in reference to their forecasting and flood-fighting plans for that particular year. That was extremely interesting. It took me back into the Red River of the North valley and let me renew knowledge of people and things that were going on.

In March of '67 I served as chairman of an arbitration board between the Idaho Power Company and Morrison-Knudsen and Perini on the Hell's Canyon project construction claims. This was more in line with the kinds of things I had done in the Corps. It was very interesting. It took a week. We ended up with a solution. There were three of us and we ended up without ever taking a vote. We talked ourselves into concurring on each step as we went along, and as chairman I just wouldn't let them quit talking until we got a sense of agreement, and then we'd move on to the next subject. I think both the Idaho Power and the Morrison-Knudsen-Perini people were satisfied with the results.

In April of 1967 I headed the team of three people to review the construction programs, procedures, and performances in Vietnam as an advisor to the Secretary of Defense. This was known as the three little bears wandering around Vietnam. We had Major General Gus Minton, who had been the head of the Air Force engineers, and Commodore Barney Hunter, who had been a fairly high member of the Navy construction agency, the Bureau of Yards and Docks.¹²⁵ We three went over there and stayed about three weeks. We saw a good deal. We got there shortly after Bert Perkins had moved in as the head of the M-K contract, which was a cost-plus-fixed-fee contract. I had advised him of the kinds of things he was going to run into in a cost-plus-fixed-fee atmosphere. Before he left I spent a whole day in Los Angeles talking to him at his office there letting him ask me any kind of questions he wanted. I was giving him the advantages of the experiences we had had in dealing with his outfit in Morocco and telling him the things to avoid and the things to look out for and so on.

We went over there and we very quickly discovered that the same kinds of problems we'd had in Morocco existed there. They had oversupplies of some items, too many people ordering--no control of that really, everybody was ordering. The material was coming in and they didn't have room to store it. I'm not talking about just the contract, I'm talking about the situation in Vietnam. We got into it pretty thoroughly. We went around the whole country. We visited a great number of commands and logistical facilities. We worked very hard in drawing up our report back in Saigon. Dan Raymond was the head of the construction program for the military at that stage, a corps of Engineers general, and we brought his people in with us when we sat down and finalized our report.¹²⁶ We got agreement pretty much on the recommendations and guidance that we gave and the places where we pointed to danger signs. Then we took off and went back to the Pentagon and reported to the Secretary of Defense with Air Force and Army participation.

Again, I believe we accomplished what they wanted--an attempt to convince Congress that you had some people with experience looking and not letting things run off. I think it was timed beautifully, because had we not done it, I think some of the things that were going on and were building up could have turned out to be more trouble. There's one little item. They had enough toilet facilities over there to last about a hundred years! Everybody had ordered. Anyhow, that was one interesting job.

I got asked to be an expert on flood-fighting and also a consultant on the construction of the Northern Power Plant Builders, which consisted of Northern Construction Company, a division of Morrison-Knudsen, on the Portage Mountain Powerhouse in British Columbia, a tremendous, big, underground powerhouse. My function was first to look at the cofferdam protection in a flood fight that was going on right then, June of '67, acceleration claims in connection with that flood fight, in connection with the work on the tunnel. I testified in the supreme court of British Columbia in reference to these and a \$50-million claim case. I was up there in May-June of '67,

March '68, August '68, October '68, January '69, October '70, July '71, March '72, and March '73. The court case turned out pretty much the way I had recommended to Northern Power Plant Builders. What they were entitled to and how to go about it. At least from their viewpoint, they thought this was very successful consulting.

I mentioned earlier that I was a member of the United States Military Academy Planning Board appointed by the Secretary of the Army. I advised on planning, design, funding, and construction for the expansion. And that was nine visits to Washington ~~or~~ West Point over a three-year period.

I was appointed by the director of the Alabama Highway Department to a board to advise him on claims submitted on construction of a federal highway project on I-10, a tunnel under the Mobile River. This was to recommend to him what construction claims submitted had merit and what we thought ought to be paid and what we thought ought to be turned down. Again, it was a three-man advisory board. I was the chairman and we did it the same way we had done it out in Idaho. We took longer this time. We worked on it almost daily for about a month and came up with answers which the highway department accepted and apparently also the construction contractor accepted. During this period I was honored by being awarded the Golden Beaver Award for engineering in 1971. It is a construction organization basically drawn from the West, and it was nice to receive the honor.

Recently I haven't been looking for assignments. I had an opportunity less than a month ago to take on one, an arbitration that would involve one of the former Dutch colonies. It would be an international arbitration, with rules set up by the international chamber of commerce. The Indonesian government would be a party. To me it looked like it was going to take several years and a considerable amount of effort. It wasn't going to be a chance to really use my experience of the past. I was going to have to sit down and do a lot of engineering analysis and so on. So I said I appreciated it, and I knew it would have been nice money coming in but "Thank you, no. I'm not going to do it unless I'm the only man in the U.S. who is suitable for the job." That more or less typifies my current situation.

My office is across the street from where the District has moved downtown. I go by there, not too often, I try and stay out of their hair, but there are things I hear which would be of interest to them, and I try and get word to them. I try and encourage them to be involved with the Society of American Military Engineers. Up until recently my wife and I have been participating in many retirement parties in the Mobile District for civilian personnel and goodbye parties for the military, but it's getting now to where there's nobody left alive walking around the Mobile District that I really knew. I play golf nearly every day with two of my former employees, one of whom is the one who was the only man in the Mobile District junior to me in 1929. He was then a messenger and he retired as chief of the contract and procurement branch recently. The other one was the chief of the operations division, who knew my wife back up in Tuscaloosa where she was born before she ever met me. Basically now, I'm the yard man at 69 Kings Way, keeping up three-quarters of an acre, which is a time consumer. I meet with the Medicare crowd, normally around nine on weekday mornings, and walk pulling a cart for 9 holes, and get it over with before lunch so we can accomplish other things during the rest of the day. And on Saturdays I normally play 18 holes pulling a cart except in the hottest part of the summer. As I said, I go to the Southern Industries office up to three times a week and I keep in touch with things that way, distribute the material that comes from these various associations to the right places in the company, answer questions, do a little bit of calling, that pretty well covers it. Of course, I travel. I have a harder time ordering my day and scheduling myself and getting things accomplished today than I did when I was working hard. Well, that's just about it as far as I'm concerned. I expect to stay here until they haul me out in a box.

Q: How secure do you think the Corps of Engineers is today in 1978? Is it facing another situation like the one in 1962?

A: There's an erosion that probably will continue forever, but I'm confident that the Corps will bounce back and continue going strong. I can't guarantee that. Sure there's a problem. It's

going on right now as you well know, with each new Congress and each new administration. I think the situation is less risky today than it was a year ago at this time. I've got no way of knowing, I just know what I read in the papers. I hope the Corps continues to do the job and continues to earn a good reputation and provide a real service and then I think it will continue to roll.

Q: Do you have any suggestions for the Corps' historical program, for things that might be emphasized?

A: I don't know, that's kind of hard. You know there have been innumerable occasions in the past when the Corps has been attacked and I have participated in several of them. Each time it seemed to me that we had to go back to scratch to try and dig up the kind of information that's necessary to combat things like this. Whether your historical department could in the course of this kind of action put together a child's guide of rebuttals to raise, I don't know.

Q: Actually there has been an attempt to do just that.

A: Good, because I can remember the days when I was in the position of doing it without telling anybody and trying to keep us from sticking our heads up as opponents to everything, but at the same time finding the arguments. There were some beautiful things written by the World War II commanders that show the advantage of the Corps having the civil works program as well as military construction, the advantages we have over any other engineering organization and any military organization in the world as a result. But whether somebody can go put their finger on it now, I have no idea. I know there have been two or three starts in that direction since I retired. You can't necessarily go out and manufacture this at the moment when you need it. You need to be able to put your hands on it.

Do you have any other questions you would like to ask?

Q: Well, I suppose we could touch briefly on one last subject, the Corps' work with the Agency for International Development [AID].

A: We did quite a little work with AID, both during the time when I was deputy and as Chief, and it is a little hard to keep them separated. It was kind of an up-and-down action, I mean they'd be in a little trouble so they'd ask for help and then as soon as they got their feet under them they'd want to freeze us back out of it to a large extent. Quite a little bit of work overseas was done with AID funds.

Q: What were some of the more outstanding examples?

A: Well, one was the terminal building at Dhahran for the Saudis. There was work in Afghanistan on a highway, a tremendous project, which I got to visit on one occasion. I can't tell you offhand but there must have been hundreds more. But again, you couldn't plan on it very much for the long term because as AID people changed assignments they became more interested in doing their own work and less interested in letting the Corps move in.

Q: Thank you very much for your time. It has been a most -enjoyable and informative interview.

